



Primary Care Anxiety Disorders Toolkit

Enclosed is a packet of supporting tools proven to be effective in the identification and treatment of Anxiety Disorders. The goal of MHS Health Wisconsin's Anxiety Disorders Toolkit is to support the screening for and treatment of anxiety disorders in the primary care setting. In addition to depression, anxiety disorders are the most common mental health issues encountered in the general medical setting. It is estimated that over 30 million Americans have a lifetime history of anxiety disorders that significantly impact individual functioning and overall costs to the medical system.

MHS Health recognizes that many of our health plan members feel most comfortable with their Primary Care Physician (PCP) as the initial point of contact for all health concerns. With that in mind, the significance of the role that PCPs play in identifying and referral for treatment of anxiety disorders cannot be understated. We hope you will have the opportunity to utilize and share this information with your patients.

This toolkit is intended to provide a basic understanding of anxiety disorders by assisting PCPs in recognizing common signs of anxiety in patients, utilizing a reliable screening tool, initiating treatment and where to refer the member for additional treatment and support.

What is Anxiety?

It is common for people to feel anxious and nervous at times when faced with stressful situations in everyday life. Anxiety is after all, a normal human emotion. An Anxiety Disorder, however, is when the symptoms of anxiety cause such distress that it significantly impacts a person's ability to lead a normal life. Evidence suggests that people living with an anxiety disorder are at greater risk for developing chronic medical conditions, and, they may also have more severe symptoms and a greater risk of death when they become ill. As with all disorders anxiety can range from a mild impairment to a serious mental illness and therefore early identification and treatment is important.

There are several recognized types of anxiety disorders, including:

- *Panic Disorder*: People with this condition have feelings of terror that strike suddenly and repeatedly with no warning.
- *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)*: People with OCD are plagued by constant thoughts or fears that cause them to perform certain rituals or routines.
- *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*: PTSD is a condition that can develop following a traumatic and/or terrifying event, such as a sexual or physical assault, the unexpected death of a loved one, or a natural disaster.
- *Social Anxiety Disorder*: Also called social phobia, social anxiety disorder involves overwhelming worry and self-consciousness about everyday social situations.
- *Generalized Anxiety Disorder*: This disorder involves excessive, unrealistic worry and tension, even if there is little or nothing to provoke the anxiety.

Signs of anxiety can often be vague or generalized to other chronic health problems making it easy to overlook in a routine office visit. The following are considered common symptoms of anxiety disorders and should lead to a healthcare professional completing a preliminary mental health screening at the time of the visit.

Symptoms vary depending on the type of anxiety disorder, but general symptoms include:

- Feelings of panic, fear and uneasiness
- Uncontrollable, obsessive thoughts
- Repeated thoughts or flashbacks of traumatic experiences
- Nightmares
- Ritualistic behaviors
- Problems sleeping
- Cold and sweaty hands and/or feet
- Shortness of breath
- Palpitations
- Dry Mouth
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- An inability to be still or calm

Screening Tools & Resources

Simple general screening tools that can be completed by the patient or administered during an office visit include:

- *Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7)* is a simple screening tool that should be utilized in primary care settings if a patient exhibits any signs and symptoms of anxiety.
- *PC-PTSD* is a four-item screen designed for use in primary care and other medical settings to screen for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Additional online tests for anxiety that are quick and simple to administer during a typical office visit can be found at www.AnxietyCentre.com. These tests include the Anxiety Rating Test, Social Anxiety Test, Anxiety Potential Test and Anxiety Disorder Test.

Best Practices

Interventions for the treatment of anxiety disorders categories: Pharmacological and psychosocial interventions. Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is a type of psychosocial treatment that helps patients to understand the thoughts and feelings that influence behaviors. Pharmacological management includes, most often, prescribing an Antidepressant, anti-anxiety medications, and beta-blockers.

For additional information about the GAD-7 and other anxiety disorder screening tools visit the following websites:

- www.nami.org
- www.nimh.nih.gov
- www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov
- www.cenpatico.com
- www.iccmhc.org